

Pre-Warm-Up Activities: Getting Started

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Most ESOL teachers would agree that the warm-up activity is one of the most creatively challenging prerequisites for a successful class.

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how a pre-warm-up technique can facilitate our demanding teaching routines, by giving the students a chance to warm themselves up-with no teacher around-according to their own motivation and ability levels.

What are Pre-warm-up Activities?

Pragmatically, these activities consist of thought-provoking and enjoyable messages that the teacher leaves (usually on the blackboard) 10 or 15 minutes before the class begins. They can appear variously as short exercises to be tried out or intriguing messages to be discussed by the students. They must spark the students' interest. The pre-warm-up messages announce the theme and aim of the ensuing class. They may also help learners do some review of previously taught materials.

Two aspects may be highlighted by the teacher when designing a pre-warm-up message: the functional aspect, which is used for self-checking an important grammar point or for presenting a new complex language structure; and the suggestive aspect, which focuses the students' attention on a specific theme. Sayings, quotations, riddles, and pictures left on the board to be commented on will probably generate good spontaneous conversations (monologues or dialogues).

What This Technique Accomplished

After I tried out the pre-warm-up technique with adult and teenage groups for six months at ABA (Associação Brasil-America, Recife), some findings emerged:

The technique . . .

1. helped enhance students' awareness of the importance of written communication;
2. generated horizontal learning (student-student), one of the most effective ways of human learning;
3. saved teacher's time (By the time I entered the classroom my students were already tuned in.);
4. caused the classes to become more dynamic and lively;
5. encouraged learners' spontaneous participation, which was sustained during the classes;
6. helped establish an atmosphere of self-evaluation and cooperative learning;
7. motivated students to arrive earlier-they did not want to miss the pre-warm-up;
8. revealed how teenagers enjoy blackboard writing;

9. inspired some students to roleplay the teacher; and
10. provided a suitable context for using English positively.

The pre-warm-up technique can be added to and improved upon. Alternative strategies can be pooled by teachers at the end of each semester. I would appreciate hearing from colleagues who try out this type of activity in their classes. My address at ABA is Av. Malaquias, 171, Aflitos, Recife 52050. Contributions are always welcome for enhancing the quality of EFL teaching all over the world.